

# Pizza Problems

Some experts<sup>1</sup> question rewarding reading with pizza.

Should kids be reading for pizza? A nationwide reading program is drawing **criticism**<sup>2</sup> for putting pizza front and center. Since 1985, the restaurant chain Pizza Hut has been running the *Book It* program, which rewards students for reading with personal pan pizzas. Now some people are taking a slice at *Book It*. They say the program promotes poor eating habits and gives Pizza Hut free advertising in public schools.



USDA.gov

*Everyone loves pizza, but should it be used as a reward for reading?*

"It's clear that Pizza Hut's *Book It* has no place in public schools....It promotes junk food," says Susan Linn, a cofounder of the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood. The group has called for schools to stop participating in the *Book It* program.

the program began, more than 200 million pizzas have been given away. Each year, from October 1 through March 31, students read books to meet monthly reading goals set by teachers. When students meet their goal for the month, they get a certificate for a personal pan pizza.

Nearly 22 million children in 50,000 U.S. schools take part in *Book It*. Since

"We're really proud of the program," says Leslie Tubbs, the director of *Book It*. "We get hundreds of e-mails from [past participants] who praise it and say it helped them get started with reading." In 1988, President Ronald Reagan honored the program for promoting **literacy**, or reading, skills.

But critics say schools can teach students to enjoy reading without the help of a fast-food company. "Schools need to realize that they are undermining their students' well-being," says nutrition expert Jane Levine. She explains that the *Book It* program is a problem not just because it rewards kids with fast food but also because it makes a large company a regular part of the school day.

<sup>1</sup> **experts:** people with special skills or knowledge

<sup>2</sup> **criticism:** finding fault in something